DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 089 CG 026 906

AUTHOR Dworkin, Sari H.
TITLE The Role of Bisexual Issues in Lesbian and Gay Psychology.
PUB DATE 11 Aug 95
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (103rd, New York, NY, August 11-15, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Homophobia; *Homosexuality; Interpersonal Relationship; Lesbianism; *Psychology; *Sexual Identity; Sexuality
IDENTIFIERS *Bisexuality

ABSTRACT

Recent studies show that those lesbians and gays who are comfortable and "out" with their identities exhibit better psychological adjustment than those who are unaccepting and hidden. This paper explores the experiences of bisexuals within the gay and lesbian movement and shows how what is known about sexual orientation and the development of a sexual identity makes the study of bisexuality critical to the study of lesbian and gay psychology. It examines: (1) Essentialism vs. Constructionism; (2) Sexual Identity; and (3) The Role of Bisexuality in Lesbian and Gay Psychology. Bisexuality challenges the notion of a static and easily defined sexual identity and may push the development of new models to explain how people come to choose their particular sexual identification. It is concluded that Lesbian and Gay Psychology needs to expand its mission to include bisexuality as well as other sexual minority identities. Contains 22 references. (JBJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 394 089

The Role of Bisexual Issues in Lesbian and Gay Psychology

Sari H. Dworkin, Ph.D.

Paper presented at the national convention of the American Psychological Association in New York City on August 11, 1995. Reprints can be obtained from: Sari H. Dworkin, Ph.D., California State University, Fresno, Department of Counseling and Special Education, 5005 No. Maple, Fresno, CA. 93740-0003.

Running Head: Role of Bisexuality

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. Dworkin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

2

CG026906

The Role of Bisexual Issues in Lesbian and Gay Psychology

Introduction

According to Rachel Wahba, 1989), "Hiding is very unhealthy for the soul" (P55.)." A quotation about the need for gay men and lesbian women to be open and honest? One might think so but this quotation is actually about the need for Jewish lesbians and gays to be open about their Judaism. It could refer to any person or any group who believes that he, she, or they must keep a major part of their identity invisible in order to fulfill those psychological needs of love and belonging. Certainly the models of lesbian and gay sexual identity development, the "coming out" models all have as final stages, acceptance, integration, and pride (ex., Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). Recent studies (see Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991) show that those lesbians and gays who are comfortable and out with their identities exhibit better psychological adjustment than those who are unaccepting and hidden. How might this research generalize to the experiences of bisexual women and men who affiliate primarily with the gay and lesbian community and believe that they have to remain hidden in order to be accepted? My paper is not going to answer that question because that research still needs to be done. But I am going to explore the experiences of bisexuals within the gay and lesbian movement and show how what we think we know about sexual orientation and the development of a sexual identity makes the study of bisexuality critical to the study of lesbian and gay psychology.

Essentialism vs. Constructionism

The debate still rages whether or not sexual orientation is determined at birth and does not change, the essentialist position (Bailey, 1995); or whether it is chosen and constructed in line with a particular historical, societal, and cultural context and can be fluid and flexible, the constuctionist position (Kitzinger, 1995). Much of the research starting with the Kinsey studies of 1948 and 50 (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy,

Martin & Gephard, 1950) moving to studies about lesbians such as Golden's (1987) work on primary and secondary lesbians, and the recent work of Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1994) on bisexuality belie the essentialist position, at least as a determination for everyone. Even the biological work on hormones, brain physiology, genes, etc. has yet to find the essential factor to explain sexual orientation. This either/or debate is analogous to the dichotomous organization of our culture's belief system (Bennett, 1992). Bisexuality challenges dualism and quite possibly essentialism. Bisexuality means having sexual feelings and/or attractions, and/or behaviors, outside of the dualistic conceptualization of homosexual/heterosexual (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977). Bisexuality challenges the notion of a static and easily defined sexual identity and may push the development of new models to explain how people come to choose their particular sexual identification.

Sexual Identity

Over the years there have been a number of models to explain how a person develops a non-heterosexual, i.e. a gay or lesbian identity, such as Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989). What's common to these two stage models and to all of the other gay/lesbian sexual identity models thus far, is the assumption of an unchanging sexual identity and the assumption of the dichotomy of heterosexual or homosexual.

Until recently no one has developed a model for bisexual identity. Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1994) in their just published book, Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality, have theorized the following stage model for Bisexual Identity Development: Initial Confusion, Settling into the Identity, and Continued Uncertainty. The major differences they found for bisexuals as compared to homosexuals were that bisexuals had earlier heterosexual experiences, added their homosexual identity to an already formed heterosexual identity (amongst women there were a sizable number who added a heterosexual identity to a previously formed lesbian identity) and were less likely to come

out as a bisexual if a supportive environment was unavailable. Their results also countered the myth that bisexuals are equally attracted to both genders. They found that bisexuals rarely exhibited equal amounts of attractions, feelings, or behaviors toward both sexes and when there was a significant other the gender of that person often determined the sexual identification. (Another words if the bisexual was in a relationship with a same-sex partner he or she identified as gay or lesbian, if the partner was of the other gender then the identification was as a heterosexual.) Weinberg's et al., (1994) study also supported other studies (Orlando, 1991; Sumpter, 1991) which have found that bisexual women experience a great deal of hostility within the lesbian community toward the idea of bisexuality and toward women who identify as bisexual. This is an interesting phenomenon since many lesbians, especially feminist lesbians, espouse belief in the construction of identity and are wary of essentialist positions.

As we learn more about sexual identity we are beginning to realize how very complex this process is. Studies show that behavior doesn't always match a person's sexual identification (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977). Many lesbians sleep with men and yet fully identify as lesbian (Rothblum, 1994). There are bisexuals who are primarily attracted to the same sex, affiliate with the gay and lesbian community, yet publicly and privately identify as bisexual. And, there are heterosexuals who choose same-sex partners yet identify as heterosexuals. Identity consists of internal experiences and external realities. Some come to their sexual identity by matching their internal experience to their outward behavior, some make political choices, some fall in love with a particular person who is of a particular gender and develop their sexual identity to match their intimate relationship, some privately identify one way but publicly identify another way in order to have a supportive community, some identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual from the earliest time they can remember, and some change their sexual identity one or more times during their lifespan. The complexity and for some the fluidity of sexual identity calls into question the

prevalent belief system which proposes that any same-sex attraction (Bi Vocals, 1983) and/or especially any same-sex activity means the individual is gay or lesbian (Barron, 1992).

The Role of Bisexuality in Lesbian and Gay Psychology

How does the aforementioned relate to the role of bisexuality in lesbian and gay psychology? First of all, there have always been and continue to be bisexually identified psychologists within Division 44. The very first survey Division 44 did of its membership showed that 29% of the respondents identified as bisexual (Kooden, Morin, Riddle, Rogers, Sand, & Strassburger, 1979). Many of us who identify as bisexual within Division 44 have remained invisible because of the perceived and experienced hostility toward bisexuality, not only within Division 44, but within the gay and lesbian community. This hostility is usually based on myths (Hutchins & Kaahmanu, 1991), some of which include: Bisexuals ultimately will claim heterosexual privilege and betray the gay and lesbian community. Bisexuals are confused about their sexuality and sit on the fence. Bisexuals will leave their same-sex partners for the other gender (Sumpter, 1991). Bisexual issues will dilute the gay and lesbian movement

The fact that bisexuals are and always have been in Division 44 is not as important as the role bisexuality plays or should play in terms of research, education, and therapeutic practice. Many of you may remember the time when gay stood for anyone not heterosexual, that definition certainly includes bisexuality. The complexities of adopting a non heterosexual sexual identity require research which rejects dichotomous thinking and therefore rejects dividing sexual identity into heterosexual and homosexual. Since part of the mission of Division 44 is to do research on gay and lesbian issues, once the hetero/homo dichotomy is rejected then the research must include bisexuality. The research of the members of the Division encompasses a broad spectrum of psychology with the

differences falling somewhere on a continuum of an emphasis on biology and physiology, to an emphasis on the effects of a sexual minority orientation on the internal and external psychodynamics of an individual, and to an emphasis on those who interact with or avoid interacting with that individual. Research on more inclusive sexual minority issues will probably move in similar directions as research on gay and lesbian issues but now it will look at differences amongst people with differing and often changing sexual identities. Bisexuals have a sexual orientation which is a minority orientation and therefore should be part of the purview of the research of the Division.

Lesbian and Gay Psychology as a primary mission of Division 44 includes a concern about the education and training of psychologists. The Division has been the primary stimulus bringing about changes in education and training which, 1. Recognize that not everyone is heterosexual. 2. Recognize that a non-heterosexual identity and lifestyle is not in and of itself, pathological, and 3. Recognize that to grow up as a sexual minority subject to discrimination by the mainstream population is difficult and necessitates the development of coping mechanisms which can be healthy or unhealthy. Recognition of the above describes not only what gays and lesbians experience, but also what bisexuals experience. The Division needs to take a leading role in the education of psychologists as to what are the differences between people growing up with non-heterosexual gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other sexual minority identities and what happens when a person changes to a non-heterosexual sexual minority identity. This education then must be translated into appropriate therapeutic practices.

Conclusion

It is time for Lesbian and Gay Psychology to expand its mission. We are all thankful for the courage of the pioneering psychologists who began the work of normalizing gay and lesbian identities, and opened up and legitimized research, education, and training in

lesbian and gay psychology. Now, once again, we need to be on the cutting edge. We must include bisexuality as well as other sexual minority identities into the psychological work that we do.

Finally, Laura Brown (1995) and others have stated that we must abandon heterosexual notions which only normalize heterosexuality. Gay and lesbian psychology has done that. But we must also abandon the idea that of the behaviors and identities that fall outside of heterosexuality only gay and lesbian identity and behavior is normal. We must, as Laura has stated, "...instead adopt a paradigm of multiple, diversely normal streams of sexual identity development with many possible successful outcomes." (Brown, 1995, P. 14).

References

Bailey, J. M. (1995). Biological perspectives on sexual orientation. In A. R. D'Augelli & C. J. Patterson (Eds.). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities over the lifespan (pp.102 - 135). New York: Oxford University Press.

Barron, S. (1992). Bisexuality, having it all. Lear's, May, 55-60 & 85.

Bennett, K. (1992). Feminist bisexuality: A both/and option for an either/or world. In E. R. Weise (Ed.). Closer to home: Bisexuality and feminism (pp. 205-231). Seattle: Seal Press.

Bi Vocals (1983), Gay-identified bisexuals. April 23, 1983, p.4.

Blumstein, P. W. & Schwartz, P. (1977). Bisexuality: Some social psychological issues. Journal of Social Issues, 33 (2), 30 - 45.

Brown, L., S., (1995). Lesbian identities: Concepts and Issues. In A. R. D'Augelli & C. J. Patterson (Eds.). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities over the lifespan (pp. 3 - 23). New York: Oxford University Press.

Cass, V. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. Journal of Homosexuality, 4, 219-235.

Golden, C. (1987). Diversity and variability. In Boston Lesbian Psychologies collective (Eds.). Lesbian Psychologies (p.p. 19-34). Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Gonsiorek, J. C. & Rudolph, J. R. (1991). Homosexual identity: Coming out and other developmental events. In J. C. Gonsiorek & J. D. Weinrich (Eds.). Homosexuality: Research implications for public policy (pp. 161 - 176). California: SAGE Publications.

Hutchins, L. & Kaahumanu, L. (1991). Bi any other name. Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc.

Kitzinger, C. (1995). Social constructionism: Implications for lesbian and gay psychology. In A. R. D'Augelli & C. J. Patterson (Eds.). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities over the lifespan (pp. 136 - 161). New York: Oxford University Press.

Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., & Martin, C. E. (1948). Sexual behavior in the human male. Philadelphia: W. B. Sanders.

Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., Martin, C. E., & Gephard, P. H. (1952). Sexual behavior in the human female. Philadelphia: W. B. Sanders.

Kooden, H.D., Morin, S.F., Riddle, D.L., Rogers, M., Sand, B.E., & Strassburger, F. (1979). Removing the stigma: Final report of the Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility for psychology's Task force on the Status of Lesbian and Gay Male Psychologists. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Orlando, L. (1991). Loving whom we choose. In L. Hutchins & L. Kaahumanu (Eds.). Bi any other name (pp. 223-232). Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc.

Rothblum, E. D. (1994), Transforming lesbian sexuality. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 18, 627-641.

Sumpter, S.F. (1991). Myths/realities of bisexuality. In L. Hutchins & L. Kaahumanu (Eds.). Bi any other name (pp. 12-13). Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc.

Troiden, R. R. (1989). The formation of homosexual identities. Journal of Homosexuality, 17 (1), 43-73.

Wahba, R., (1989). Hiding is unhealthy for the soul. In C. Balka, & A. Rose (Eds.). Twice blessed (pp. 48 - 56). Boston: Beacon Press.

Weinberg, M. S., Williams, C. J. & Pryor, D. W. (1994). Dual attraction: Understanding bisexuality. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weise, E.R. (Ed.). (1992). Closer to home: Bisexuality and feminism. Seattle: Seal Press.

Zita, J. N. (1981). Historical amnesia and the lesbian continuum. Signs, 7(1), 172-187.